

Notes on visit to Eden Rivers Trust by John Cleaver: 20 June 06

Has been going for about 10 years. Initial funding came from compensation for a major pollution incident. In the early years concentrated on fencing, and education. Fencing and buffer strip creation is still a large part of their work.

In recent years they have put a lot of work into trying to understand the catchment much better, so that they can target areas that need specific action, i.e. the particular problems that certain areas face, and the solutions needed to address them. There are two main strands:

1. Juvenile electro-fishing surveys. They have their own equipment and are licensed by the EA to use it. Using a consistent, and calibrated, method the Fisheries Officer (Judith Brown) surveys 250 to 350 sites each year, and they have been doing this for 4 years, so have built up a lot of data. They can then correlate this data with factors such as erosion, shading, substrate, land use, connectivity (speed of run off from land to water coarse) etc. Also they can see the impact of one-off events such as the Jan 2005 floods (answer salmon not impacted, trout were). Electro-fishing needs a 2 man team, and the second is always a volunteer).
2. GIS mapping. Using detailed river corridor aerial photographs, and land height data a very thorough assessment of the whole catchment can be done 'from the office'. A PhD student (Lucy Dugdale) has been doing this, now 2 and a half years into the 3 year project). The factors that are plotted are, erosion, stock encroachment, vegetation and shading, land use and 'connectivity'. The importance of the latter is that farming practices on land that is 'highly connected' are much more important than land with low connectivity. Optimum river productivity comes with medium connectivity, i.e. the water needs some nutrient enrichment from run off, but not too much.

Putting this data together the locations and specific farms to be targeted are identified. The farmers are then visited by the Habitat officer - Will Cleasby - an ex farmer, so he talks their language, and he does an assessment of the farm and suggest projects to improve things. I did not meet Will.

The best projects to go for initially are fencing to create a buffer strip, and removal of man made obstructions (weirs, culverts etc.) Both of these can show an excellent return on investments, and it needs no particular skills to spot the opportunities.

Judith Brown is the Fisheries Officer. Apart from the juvenile surveys here main work is associated with the removal of man made barriers to migration, weirs culverts etc Staff and management charges are included in the project funding for these. e.g. a \$25k project may include £7/8k of staff time - it do not need many of those a year to cover someone's salary.

Many anglers are still of the view that the best thing to do is to stock. ERT favor habitat improvement to allow natural regeneration if possible. For instance in locations where there are high fry densities but low parr, say due to poor habitat & high predation, adding more fry or parr will not improve matters. It is habitat change that is needed.

Stocking is only carried out above man made barriers that are scheduled to be removed or have a fish pass added, i.e. areas that are devoid of migratory stock. (This is the only stocking that the EA consent.) They get the fish by netting them directly off the redds, stripping them, fertilising the eggs, carefully counting and sorting them, and putting them in Scotty boxes, then putting them out. They take the brood fish from lower down the same tributary where they are to be stocked. The operation is very labor intensive, a team of 8 people normally needed, some can be volunteers. This year they are only planning to do trout, as there are no previously inaccessible locations needing seeding. They did run a hatchery, but this proved very expensive and they have stopped doing this.

Rob Coleman is HLF Project Manager for the 'Discover Eden' project. This is a partnership with East Cumbria Countryside project and has HLF funding of £1M. This is mainly to do with access (a series of circular walks with 'interpretation' - guides, etc.) and education. There is a full time Education Officer (Becky Helm - who I did not meet as she was out with the kids).

Rob has had a lot to do with the "Go Wild in Eden" scheme, where anglers can buy tokens for use on 16 beats on the upper tribbs, typically water that was held by farmers or other landowners but was not let. Each token is £2.50. The landowner gets £2 and the Trust 50p. There is a similar scheme on the Wye and Usk and the tokens are interchangeable. (Do we have much water in the SCRT area that this type of scheme could be applied to? - water that is either not fished, or very lightly fished).

There are always some farmers and landowners who are environmentally conscious and prepared to have buffer strips, fencing etc. If some do not want it, then just move on and concentrate on the ones who do. They often come round in time.

Ian Gregg

Was chairman of the Trustees, but is temporarily managing the Trust following Alistair Maltby's departure to ART.

Current core costs (mainly salaries) are about £150k/annum. This comes from a variety of sources, but is somewhat 'hand to mouth'. UU have been a major funder in the past. Contributions from angling owners and clubs is typically £10k to £20k per annum, and typically that from just a few. Ian is of the view that as the main beneficiaries of the habitat work, in the long term anglers must be prepared to fund a greater proportion of the core costs as the current situation may not be sustainable.

Thoughts on how this lot applies to us

1. ERT have relied heavily on voluntary effort in recent years, generally they have been able to fund salaries for appropriate people to do the work. (However Ribble who I am seeing next week - have done a considerable amount with voluntary effort, neither model is 'right'.)
2. We cannot expect all anglers and clubs to be 'with us' initially - all Trusts have the same experience, it can take a long time for hardened and negative attitudes to come round, but it does happen. Their advice is to get on with the job, utilizing the money and support, that we have got. If certain river associations do not form - does it matter? It certainly does not stop us progressing.